**Getting over long-term unemployment**

Finding work is a big challenge for many unemployed people in South Africa. You may find that it becomes increasingly more difficult to find work, the longer you are unemployed. You may also start thinking that nobody understands the problems you are experiencing. You may feel increasingly embarrassed, stressed, angry, depressed, lonely, frustrated, irritated, helpless and hopeless. It is, however, necessary that you take definite steps to stay positive and motivated and to persevere in your efforts to find another job.

**Manage your stress**

Stress is part of everyone’s life and running away from it is not an option. While some stress is good to have, too much of it can actually threaten your health. When you feel frustrated or stressed, you often will find yourself procrastinating on things you need to get accomplished. Here are some tips to help you reduce your stress.

* ***Get active****:* When you have been unemployed for a long time, you may slip into feelings of not being motivated very easily. You might want to just sit and watch TV or stare in space. One of the most important changes that you can make will be to get active and do things. Being active will relieve your stress, since you cannot be stressed when you have to do certain activities.
* ***Create a routine*:** To counter your stress of not having work, you candevelop a routine for yourself, so that you can feel safe. Write down a routine for yourself with specific times for getting up, breakfast, job-hunting, lunch, job-hunting again, exercise, a hobby or visiting a friend, watching TV or sport, supper and a set bed-time for your week. Also build in time to maintain your personal image, such as having a haircut, mending clothes, etc. Make sure you repeat certain pleasant tasks regularly, so you can have something to look forward to everyday. Stick to your timetable.
* ***Keep a journal*** about how you are living day to day. Journaling your feelings and what you have accomplished for the day, or even failed at, will give you something to look back on and remind yourself how you got through the stressful times. When you write your feelings and activities down, you will feel more in control and you will find a sense of relief.
* ***Exercise*** is a great way to open your mind and release the inner stress you have. When you exercise, your brain releases chemicals called endorphins, which help you feel less stressed. Your body also releases toxins, which lowers your stress level. Exercise will also help you to focus more on yourself and less on the stress that is in your life. You will also be able to get back into shape and you will feel better physically, which will help you mentally. Taking a walk and focusing on the beauty of nature, such as plants and trees will refresh you physically and mentally and is a great way of reducing stress.
* ***Keep busy***: Do the things that you like and find interesting. They will take your mind away from your problems and improve your mood.
* ***Cut down on stimulants***: It is dangerous if you try to alleviate your stress by means of substance abuse. By abusing alcohol and drugs you will only create more problems for yourself. Your body has to work hard to eliminate them and it leaves you with less energy to cope with your problems. Eat healthy, balanced meals regularly.
* ***Enough sleep***: An adult needs about six to eight hours sleep to function properly. Getting enough sleep will make you feel more rested to cope with challenges.
* ***Breathing exercises*** can also help to alleviate stress. Inhale deeply and slowly, hold your breath for about five counts and then exhale slowly. Do this a few times until you feel calmer.
* ***Support system****:* Confide in someone you trust when you feel very down, sad or stressed. Be sure the person you are talking to, will listen and give you some advice. Having a support system that will be there for you, will help you to lower your stress and keep you motivated and end procrastination

**Become positive and motivated**

Motivation is the driving force that creates actions and results. Here are a few tips on how to stay positive and motivated under difficult circumstances.

* Take control of your own life. You are NOT at the mercy of your circumstances. **YOU** can make things happen.
* Have a dream for your life. Focus on your dreams and making them come true. Have a goal and purpose in your life. Do not give up on your dreams.
* Write down personal goals of what you want to accomplish with dates to achieve each goal by. Then break down the bigger goals into smaller activities that will help you reach each goal with timeframes to complete each activity. Write down rewards that you will give yourself for achieving each goal-these need not cost money. You must also add job-hunting to the goals. Setting goals and seeing what you wrote down, will help you to focus on one activity at a time and be motivated, as well as lower your stress level.
* Carry your ideas through. Don’t quit before you even started.
* Say to yourself over and over, that your situation will change and belief it.
* Feed your brain with positive thoughts about your situation. Participate in activities that you know you like and which will make you experience positive emotions. Never let one emotion control your life and make you miserable, because your life will stagnate.
* Talk to yourself in a positive way. Notice when you start to discredit yourself. Replace self-criticism with constructive self-talk.
* Recognise your strong points and achievements. Focus on your potential and how you can capitalise on your strengths.
* Believe in yourself. Ask yourself what you did right and congratulate yourself. Do not wait for others to acknowledge you. How you see yourself is a key factor in staying positive and developing self-esteem.
* Life is about choices. Make your own decisions. The decisions you make, will make you who you are. Make life changing decisions when necessary.

**Improve your self-confidence**

If we have confidence that we can accomplish something, we can acquire the capacity to do it. History is full of ordinary people who became heroes and heroines by the sheer power of self-confidence.

With self-confidence and greater inner drive, people of mediocre ability can go further in life than those with exceptional talents. Those who lack self-confidence, underestimate who they are and overestimate what they are not. They look for confidence externally, without realizing that it comes from within.

Without self-confidence, we cannot be at peace; instead, fear and negative emotions take over our lives. Unfortunately, if we do not believe in ourselves, no one else will either.

* *Look fear in the face*: Tackle the things that you think you cannot do. Do not give up at the first hurdle. Be tough enough to follow through. Put all excuses aside and be bold.
* *Be eager to learn* and find knowledge.
* Remind yourself of *past successes*.
* Read and *listen to positive material*.
* *See your future success*.
* *Think with confidence*.
* *Take action with confidence*.

**Set realistic goals for yourself**

Check if one of the issues below is playing a role in preventing you from finding a job:

* Sometimes people target too narrow a career field of the labour market. Perhaps too few jobs are open in that career field.
* People often target a too high-level job. Perhaps you need to aim down a notch or two, just to get work first.
* Also consider jobs that are not exactly what you have in mind. You will gain valuable experience and also increase your chances of finding employment.
* Consider temporary work even if the remuneration is little. You can gain valuable work experience and get references that future employers can contact. For more information on volunteering opportunities, you can contact VOSESA (Volunteer and Service Enquiry Southern Africa) at [www.vosesa.org.za](http://www.vosesa.org.za).
* Think innovative and use your interests to create an income whilst you are looking for a permanent job. You can earn money through activities such as baking or sewing, planting vegetables, repairing cars or shoes or even by walking other people’s dogs.
* Computer skills are a basic requirement for various jobs. Consider doing a computer course if you don’t have computer skills.
* Do not isolate yourself. You may loose a lot of opportunities.
* You can also obtain recognition of prior learning. Your practical experience and qualifications gained in a specific field, such as fixing motor cars in your free time, can be assessed. You can get credit for skills and experience that you already possess, and for your qualifications, such as modules of learning that you have already completed. Your training period to qualify for a specific occupation will, therefore, be shorter. Assessments of prior learning are being done by the Institute for the National Development of Learnerships, Employment Skills and Labour Assessments (INDLELA) and by training providers. You can contact INDLELA at 011 206 1000.
* Do you have personal problems that keep you from being a good employee? For example, are you preoccupied with family problems? A physical or mental health issue? A drug or alcohol problem? If so, you need to address the problem and get help to overcome it.
* Do you need an attitude adjustment? Have you become negative and a constant complainer? Changing your attitude can change your life. Try viewing life as a half glass full.
* If you had many job interviews, none of which yielded a job-offer, you may have poor interviewing skills. Make an appointment with the Career Counsellor at your nearest Labour Centre for a free Job-hunting, Employment Counseling, Stress management, Money Management and/or Emotional Intelligence life skills programme-it will help to give your job-hunting direction and help you to take control over your situation.

**Organise and plan your job search**

Finding work is about how you present yourself in the best possible way. Remember, job-hunting is a full-time job and you must do it correctly. You should spend 20 to 30 hours per week on job-searching to be successful.

How wisely do you spend your job search time? Good uses of time is answering advertisements that you are truly qualified for, asking people in your personal or professional network for leads and contacting desirable employers.

Job search does not happen in isolation. Ideally it should be guided by your career plan.

**Job-search checklist**

* I have a career plan for myself. Yes / No.
* I have organised and planned a job search. Yes / No.
* I know what I can offer an employer. Yes / No.
* I have done research to identify potential work opportunities. Yes / No.
* I have identified people that can help me find a job? Yes / No.
* I have registered as a work-seeker with the Department of Labour. Yes/No

If you answered **No** on one or more of these statements, it meansthat there are somesteps that you can take to improve your chances of finding work.

*Here are some suggestions to plan your job search so that you do not waste time, energy and money:*

* ***Make a daily to-do list of your job-hunting tasks*** Plan set actions for your job-hunting

for each day and do not deviate from your plan before you have completed those actions listed next to the specific date. You can for example list issues such as registering as a work-seeker with the Department of Labour, checking the internet and newspapers for job offers, hearing whether friends do not know of opportunities and cold-calling employers. Once you make your list, display it somewhere you can see it daily. When you can see what you want to accomplish on a daily basis, your mind will constantly remind you what you need to be doing. Do the most important tasks first. The lists will help you feel that you have control over your situation and will focus your job-hunting. Mark completed tasks off, so you can feel a sense of accomplishment. Give yourself a small reward if you accomplished all tasks for the day-such as a visit to a friend or a special meal.

* ***Register as work-seeker with Department of Labour:*** Registering as work-seeker on the Employment Services system of South Africa (ESSA) should be your first step to job-search.Employers register their job and training opportunities on the ESSA and you can be referred for these if you meet the employer’s requirements-this is a free of charge service.
* ***Create a job-search folder***. This can be a file in which you keep track of job leads, job advertisements and contacts. Also store copies of your certificates and ID document in case you need them. Keep track of all the jobs that you have applied for, as well as feedback that you received. This folder can also be used to store all the research that you have completed in terms of occupations, jobs, industries, and possible employers.
* ***Research the job opportunities***: Find out as much as possible about the jobs that you are interested in, as well as the company that are advertising the job. You should organise the information so that you are able to match the jobs to your skills, education and experience.

You can analyse jobs in terms of the following:

* What skills are required?
* What qualifications are required?
* What characteristics are required?
* What experience is needed?
* What kind of a position is it? (part-time, full-time, learnership, internship).

When you have been unemployed for a long period, the bottom line is to never give up. If you persevere, you will find opportunities. Remember, never give up – keep on looking.